

RECLAMATION

Managing Water in the West

U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Reclamation

Fish Grown On Trees

Whitefish Island Project, Methow River, WA

[music]

Brian Fischer: Fish grow on trees.

[music]

Jen Molesworth: The trees in the river provide habitat for fish, and that makes more fish. The dying salmon actually feeds the surrounding landscape. That helps grow the trees and the vegetation that then, in turn, feeds the river.

Brian: During floods, when the water's up, the trees help slow down the water and provided places for fish and other organisms to get out of the high flows.

Chris Johnson: So this project that we're working on in the Whitefish Island reach will put 300-400 pieces of wood into the side channel to let the river narrow itself. This channel is overly-wide, its shallow, it has very little habitat, and only sees water during high flows and flood flows. Fish can't get to them, fish can't use them.

Jen: These rivers historically had a lot of wood in them, and over the course of the last hundred years a lot of that material has been removed. We kind of realize we went a little bit too far with that, and now we need to start putting some of that material back.

[machinery]

Brian: We're doing that by a combination of placing engineered log jams, in the reach we're removing the levee's and some dam remnants to allow more interaction between the river and the flood plain and riparian areas.

Jen: They're built almost like a log cabin where you put down a foundation of logs, and then perpendicular to that foundation is another layer of logs. And it's meant to withstand a hundred-year flood event and provide habitat at a wide range of flows every year.

Chris: And so we designed the wood similar to a pinball machine where the flow will come through the channel and bounce from right bank and left bank and back again and carve a changeable and ever-changing central channel to the site. That variability is one of the most important things for salmon.

[water flows]

Jen: These rivers are beautiful places. They run through our communities. They serve us in a lot of ways. But we're putting back some of the things that we've taken out, and I feel really good about that.

Chris: And that diversity, complexity, and variety is what it takes to a healthy ecosystem, a healthy river system, and a healthy community.

[music]